

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:
BUILD CONNECTOR TRAILS**

March 1999



**Acadia National Park
Hancock and Knox Counties · Maine**

United States Department of the Interior · National Park Service

Executive Summary

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to build six trails to connect Acadia National Park with the adjacent villages of Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor, Maine. The purposes of connector trails are to help reduce automobile congestion as recommended in the park's General Management Plan (National Park Service 1992), to provide closer and safer trail access to the park for pedestrians and bicyclists, and to enhance community life for local residents. No new parking would be associated with them.

These six connector trails emerged as the highest priorities of the Village Connector Trails Committee, formed in 1997 under the leadership of Friends of Acadia (FOA). Members of the committee include interested residents of Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor and staff from Friends of Acadia and the National Park Service.

A No Action alternative and a Preferred Alternative (to build six trails) are presented in this Environmental Assessment for evaluation. Public response to alternatives in this Environmental Assessment will help the NPS decide whether to build any or all of the six connector trails.

Under the No Action alternative, no trails would be built. Without connector trails visitors would continue to drive into the park to hike, contributing in some small degree to local air pollution and traffic congestion. Using the new bus system to make one way hikes or bike rides to or from the park would be slightly less attractive to visitors. Pedestrian safety on some commonly used access roads would not be improved. Disturbance to soils, vegetation, and wildlife from trail construction and use would not occur. Potential community problems, such as trespass or vandalism from increased traffic, would not occur. However, community life would not be enhanced with easily accessed trails. No extra burden would be placed on park staff or communities to maintain trails and police problems associated with trails. Several connector trails that make use of abandoned trails or roads that are important cultural resources would not change their status. They would continue to slowly deteriorate over time.

Under the Preferred Action alternative, six connector trails would be built. Soils, trees, and other plants would be removed in construction. Trail use may displace wildlife from commonly used habitats. Connector trail alignments were selected to minimize these effects wherever possible by using abandoned roads and trails and by not bisecting undisturbed habitat. Standard construction techniques would minimize erosion. These trails would not affect any threatened or endangered species or cultural resources. Local air quality and traffic congestion in the park may be improved somewhat if a few visitors and residents forego the use of their cars. The trails would enhance visitor experiences and community life by providing closer and safer access to the park from towns. On the other hand, several small tracts of currently wild, undeveloped lands would have abandoned trails formalized and maintained, or new trails built through them, and this may affect visitors choosing to experience the park off trail or on abandoned trails. Community groups, the town, and the park must assume the responsibilities of trail maintenance and the monitoring of parking, trespass, or other issues within their jurisdictions. The committee would ensure that trails are maintained, signed, and promoted according to landowner wishes, with an emphasis on user education and continuing the tradition of appropriate use of and respect for private property on Mount Desert Island. Several connector trails that make use of abandoned trails or roads that are important cultural resources would be rehabilitated and offer the opportunity to illustrate the history of Mount Desert Island and the trail system. No Native American cultural resource would be affected.

Interested persons are invited to review this document and submit written comments by April 12, 1999 to:

Superintendent
Acadia National Park
P.O. Box 177
Bar Harbor, ME 04609

Acadia National Park Mission Statement

The National Park Service at Acadia National Park protects and conserves outstanding scenic, natural, and cultural resources for present and future generations. These resources include a glaciated coastal and island landscape, biological diversity, clean air and water, and a rich cultural heritage. Acadia National Park also offers opportunities for high quality non-consumptive recreation, education, and scientific research.

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND NEED

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to build six trails to connect Acadia National Park with the adjacent villages of Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor, Maine. These trails would be built as staff and funding are available, provided there are no changes in the circumstances associated with their development.

The purposes of connector trails are: 1. to help reduce automobile congestion as recommended in the park's General Management Plan (NPS 1992) by encouraging visitors and residents to forego the use of cars, 2. to provide closer and safer trail access to the park for pedestrians and bicyclists, and 3. to enhance community life for local residents. Connector trails are needed because congested park roads degrade the quality of visitor experiences by making driving and parking difficult. Frequent use of several roads by pedestrians and bicyclists to access the park today attest to the need for connector trails as well. Connector trails can be viewed as one of several complementary measures aimed at reducing auto congestion in the park. The new islandwide bus system, scheduled to begin in 1999, is the centerpiece of this effort.

Former trail connections between the towns and the park have been lost for several reasons. The development of the Park Loop Road for use by motor vehicles, the increasing dependence of visitors on their automobiles and an emphasis on auto touring, low trails use (especially in the 1950's), the 1947 fire, development of private lands, and low funding all caused former connector trails to fall into disuse.

THE DECISION

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service is required to provide the opportunity for public comment on federal actions affecting the environment. This Environmental Assessment serves that requirement by providing alternative actions and an analysis of their impacts.

Public comment on the alternatives in this Environmental Assessment will help the NPS decide whether to build any or all of the six connector trails, along the alignments described in detail later in this document or variations of them. Interested persons are invited to review this document and submit written comments by April 12, 1999 to:

Superintendent
Acadia National Park
P.O. Box 177
Bar Harbor, ME 04609

BACKGROUND

The six connector trails proposed here emerged as the highest priorities of the Village Connector Trails Committee (hereafter, the committee), formed in 1997 under the leadership of Friends of Acadia (FOA). Members of the committee include interested residents of Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor, FOA and Acadia National Park (ANP) staff, and a staff member of the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program. The Rivers and Trails Program assists communities in developing trails, and sometimes works with projects involving national parks.

The committee established the following criteria for connector trails. Connector trails would ideally achieve as many of these as possible:

- follow the shortest distance from the town to the park;
- reestablish or reuse historic trails or roads, if appropriate;
- where the trail is outside the park, involve the fewest private landowners and have their support;
- connect with existing park trails;
- be easily accessible via the islandwide bus system;
- be located so as to minimize effects to the local community;
- be located so as to minimize effects to natural and cultural resources;
- provide access for hikers, bikers, skiers, and equestrians as appropriate;
- have community support and
- be accessible to as many people as possible within the community.

The committee focused on a few important trails that met many of the above criteria, rather than a larger planning effort encompassing all possible trails. Although some of these trails or portions of them will be accessible to wheelchair use, they are not designed to be wheelchair accessible.

Connector trails are designed to encourage visitors and residents to leave their car at home or at the motel, and begin their hike or bike ride from town. No new parking would be associated with them.

Public involvement thus far in the connector trails project has included members of the Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor communities serving on the committee. A list of participants is found at the end of this document. Prior to the first connector trails meeting, Julie Isbill of the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program interviewed more than 20 people including the following: park staff, FOA staff, FOA Trails and Carriage Road Committee members, Maine Coast Heritage Trust staff in Northeast Harbor, conservation commission members from Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor, the business community, the editor of the local newspaper, and guidebook authors.

Publicity about the connectors trail project has included an article introducing the idea (Bar Harbor Times, May 29, 1997), an issue of the FOA journal with three related articles about connector trails (summer 1997), a hike along the proposed Great Meadow Loop

connector on National Trails Day (June 1998), and the recent completion of the related Acadian Ridge Trail on private land adjacent to the park (September 1998).

A tradition of public use of trails on private lands was established long ago on Mount Desert Island, and it continues today in Northeast Harbor and Seal Harbor. Maine law provides excellent liability protection to private landowners allowing such public use. As envisioned by the committee, the six proposed connector trails would continue outside the park through the cooperation of private landowners, extending trails as close as possible to towns. *Although the committee has talked with all the private landowners involved, discussions are continuing, and this Environmental Assessment does not presume any permission has been granted.* A variety of legal and more informal mechanisms are available to ensure continued public use of these trails, depending on the wishes of the landowner. The committee is seeking landowner agreements lasting at least ten years. Some of the proposed connector trails are still viable, in part or in full, without private landowner cooperation. While the focus of this environmental assessment is evaluating the effects of developing connector trails on park lands (and those effects do extend outside the park), inevitably, it must discuss the effects of potential trail development on private lands as well.

Two other ongoing park projects are related to the development of connector trails. A Historic Resource Study of the park trails system is almost completed. Several proposed connector trails follow the currently abandoned routes of historic trails or roads. Preliminary results suggest that these abandoned trails or roads are important cultural resources because of their integrity, high degree of craftsmanship, or important historic associations with the history of Mount Desert Island and trails development. The final results of the study may affect whether or how these connector trails are reopened and maintained. In addition, the NPS has begun a planning process to determine what the configuration of the trail system should be as the park enters the 21st century, including how it should be managed and maintained. Public comment on the alternatives in this Environmental Assessment will help the NPS decide whether these six trails should become a part of that system. Another Environmental Assessment looking at the configuration and recreational use of the entire trail system will be prepared for public review later this year.

ISSUES

Issues arise when there are effects on physical, biological, social, or economic resources. Building trails usually involves effects on all of these. We have identified the following important issues that will be addressed in more detail in the Environmental Consequences section of this document: natural resources (biotic communities, floodplains/wetlands, soil erosion, threatened and endangered species and species of concern, water quality, air quality), visitor experiences, communities and neighbors, park operations, and cultural resources.

ALTERNATIVES

In this section, two alternatives are described: Alternative A, a no action alternative, and Alternative B, a preferred action alternative recommending the construction of six connector trails. The no action alternative provides a basis for comparing the management direction and environmental consequences of the preferred action. As mentioned, any combination of fewer than six connector trails can be considered as an alternative also. For those connector trails for which different alignments were considered, we describe these different alignments and explain why one was recommended and others rejected. A discussion of mitigation measures for Alternative B is presented after a discussion of its effects.

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)

This alternative continues present management of the park trail system. No new connector trails would be built. These connector trails and others would be considered again when the Environmental Assessment for the entire trail system is conducted.

ALTERNATIVE B (PREFERRED)

Locations of the six proposed connector trails are shown in Figure 1 (Bar Harbor) and Figure 2 (Southwest Harbor) and are named as follows: Great Meadow Loop, Duck Brook Road, Gurnee Path, Jackson Lab/Sieur de Monts, Old Beech Hill Road, and Western Mountain Road. All are described below.

Great Meadow Loop

This loop trail and its spurs are intended for foot traffic only. It would use the Bar Harbor YMCA as a starting point, and in some places, it would use existing sidewalks. Along parts of Ledge lawn Extension, Spring Street, and Cromwell Harbor Road outside the park it would be built as a roadside path (for all intents and purposes a graveled sidewalk) on existing town road easements.

The trail would rarely be more than 50 feet from a paved road throughout its length and would be constructed with a tread of crushed stone four feet wide to make it accessible to most walkers. It would not be designed for wheelchairs, but much of it would be reasonably accessible to them. The entire trail would be 2.2 miles long with 0.8 miles in the park.

Cooperation of the following landowners would make this trail possible: Kebo Valley Club, the Holy Redeemer Cemetery, the Ledge lawn Cemetery, the Town of Bar Harbor, the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association, one private landowner, and the park.

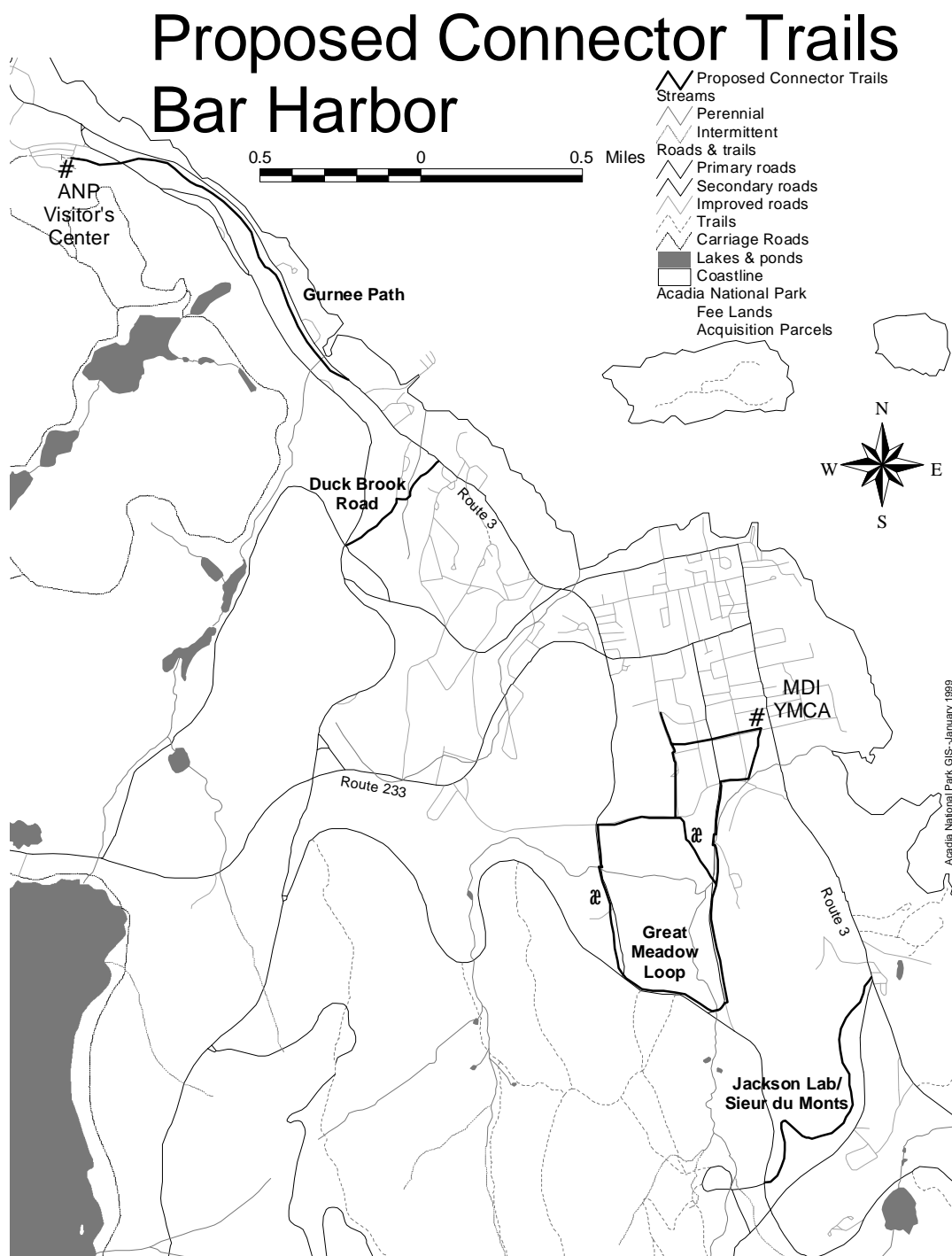


Figure 1: Proposed Connector Trails in Bar Harbor

The Great Meadow Loop would connect with the park's Jesup Path and Hemlock Road, both of which lead to Sieur de Monts and beyond. Part of the loop would resurrect the original Jesup Path connection to the park from the corner of Cromwell Harbor Road and Harden Farm Road, where an engraved stone still marks the trailhead. The Jesup Path is important for its association with trails history on Mount Desert Island. This resurrection, the use of two short sections of the original path, and the fact that it is a Memorial Path all add to the historic value of this part of the Great Meadow Loop.

Along Ledgelawn Extension, an old roadbed just east of the existing road would be used for the trail. It is still in good shape and little construction work would be needed other than brushing and restoring some culverts and ditches at the northern end.

Two wooden bridges would be built according to the same design (to be determined), and that design would be compatible with or similar to designs for historic footbridges in the park. The first would span Cromwell Brook on park land at the site where a second part of Ledgelawn Extension once crossed the brook before reaching the Park Loop Road. The park removed the paved road here some years ago and the area was planted with trees. The second bridge would cross Kebo Brook on land owned by the Kebo Valley Club in a forested tract just west of Ledgelawn Extension. This bridge would be part of a spur route from Ledgelawn extension to the back of the Ledgelawn Cemetery. This section of the trail would not be built as a four-foot wide gravel path; it would be similar to other hiking trails in the park.

Both inside and outside of the park, the Great Meadow Loop would be built through mostly well-drained upland hardwood forest with occasional white pines. Wetlands would be avoided.

Duck Brook Road

From the upper end of the Bar Harbor Motel complex on Route 3, this connector trail would follow an old roadbed that leads directly to the Paradise Hill Road overpass of Duck Brook Road. It would be about 1,000 feet long. From here it is about one half mile along Duck Brook Road to make a connection with the carriage roads at Duck Brook Bridge. The former use and purpose of this road is unknown, but it probably has little historic value.

The trail climbs through an upland hardwood forest, and little work would be done to the existing trail surface. A few waterbars may be needed on the steepest part. An agreement with the landowner would allow public pedestrian access to the park boundary. The college and many motels in this area offer a great opportunity to provide access into the park for many people. This trail is for foot traffic only. A brochure and signs would direct bicyclists staying in this area up Highbrook Road to the West Street Extension and Duck Brook Road.

Gurnee Path

The Gurnee Path is an abandoned trail running along “the Bluffs” west of Route 3 between Sonogee Estates and the Inn at Canoe Point. Construction of Route 3 has obliterated either end of the former trail. The Gurnee Path would connect the College of the Atlantic and motels along Route 3 with the Hulls Cove Visitor Center, Hulls Cove, and carriage roads. It would accommodate foot traffic only. It would also offer spectacular views over Frenchman Bay and might be appealing to nearby hotel guests even without the continuing connection to the visitor center. Burial of utility lines would enhance these views and would be a secondary goal if this trail were reestablished.

What remains of the Gurnee Path today reflects a high degree of craftsmanship, with numerous retaining walls, stone culverts, and a well-defined tread. Built in 1926, the Gurnee Path has historic value because of its highly engineered construction and because it was established as a memorial path with an endowment. Reconstruction of this path and the construction of new trail at either end would have to match as closely as possible the previous historic style for the trail, including the tread. The Historic Resource Study of the park’s trail system will eventually provide the necessary guidelines should this trail be reopened.

This trail would be entirely on park property and run from near the end of the sidewalk just north of the ferry terminal (hikers would cross to the west side of Route 3) to the visitor center. About 1,500 feet of new trail would be constructed at each end through upland hardwood and mixed forests. The existing part of the Gurnee Path is about 2,000 feet long, making the entire trail about 5,000 feet long. Duck Brook would be bridged if an environmentally acceptable location can be found near Route 3. If such a location cannot be found, the trail would cross Duck Brook adjacent to Route 3. The trail would stay as far as possible from the private residence on Route 3 south of the Visitor Center. In an action separate from this Environmental Assessment and proposed connector trail, the park will likely acquire the old carriage house across from Sonogee Estates within the next year, thus avoiding conflicts with its potential use as a residence.

Jackson Laboratory/Sieur de Monts

This trail would connect the Town of Bar Harbor near the Ocean Drive Dairy Bar with the Sieur de Monts area of the park. It would be for foot traffic only. The only landowners involved are the Jackson Laboratory and the park. Beginning at the end of the sidewalk at Schooner Head Road, the trail would cross Route 3 as a crosswalk and enter Jackson Laboratory property, gaining elevation and moving southwest from the road to avoid wetlands. The trail would use the remains of an old road for a short distance, follow the Jackson Lab water tower road uphill, and branch left around the back of the parking area on the west side of Route 3.

Continuing south, the trail would eventually connect with an abandoned road running from Route 3 to the Park Loop Road. Turning right, the trail would use this roadbed heading west. Before reaching the Park Loop Road the trail would turn left on a newly cut trail and head south a couple hundred yards before connecting with another old

roadbed that continues south parallel to the Park Loop Road. The trail would follow this old road to the Sieur de Monts turnoff from the Park Loop Road, ending at the Park Loop Road. From here hikers would cross the Park Loop Road and follow the paved road into Sieur de Monts to access attractions and trails.

One of these old roads may be part of the old Harden Farm Road and nothing is known of the other. Their historic value is unknown, but their reuse is not believed to be a problem.

This alignment would require building about 6,000 feet of new trail, about half on park land and half on Jackson Laboratory land. About 1,000 feet of old roadbeds would be used. The trail tread would be that of a hiking trail; it would not be surfaced with any material.

Alternatives considered and rejected were an alignment that continued across the entrance to the Jackson Laboratory parking lot staying relatively close to Route 3 until the power line and following the power line to the Park Loop Road near Sieur de Monts. The power line area is somewhat wet, and this alignment would require building more trail because there are no old roadbeds. It would also be closer to Route 3 and the noise of traffic. A spur trail leading from the entrance to the Jackson Laboratory to a viewpoint on Great Meadow Hill and an alignment going directly over Great Meadow Hill were also considered and rejected. These alignments were felt to intrude too much on undisturbed habitat, especially for deer. The proposed alignment makes the connection to Sieur de Monts, uses already existing old roads, and offers the opportunity for Jackson Laboratory employees to walk to work from Bar Harbor without using the roadside.

Old Beech Hill Road

The Old Beech Hill Road follows the first route from Southwest Harbor to Somesville. It may be as much as 200 years old, and thus of important historic value for its association with the early history of Mount Desert Island. It would be for foot traffic only. This trail would connect Southwest Harbor with Beech Mountain Trails and the Echo Lake Beach.

Much of it is still intact. It would start on the west side of Route 102 near Norwood Cove and run north-northwest to the Smugglers Den Campground. The campground owner is the only private landowner involved with this trail. It would follow a yet undesignated alignment through the campground, not following the Old Beech Mountain Road. Beyond the campground, it will cross Lurvey Brook, following an existing path across the park boundary to the Lurvey Spring Road. A slight jog in the trail (south) would be made along Lurvey Spring Road to rejoin the Old Beech Mountain Road. On the west side of Lurvey Spring Road, the Old Beech Mountain Road runs in a direct line to the existing Valley Trail, connecting with it about 0.2 miles from the Beech Mountain Parking Area. The trail in the park runs through a mixed upland forest. About 3,000 feet of the old road and new trail are outside the park. About one mile is inside the park. Very little new trail would need to be cut or built. Stabilization of existing erosion would be needed. The trail tread would not be surfaced with additional material.

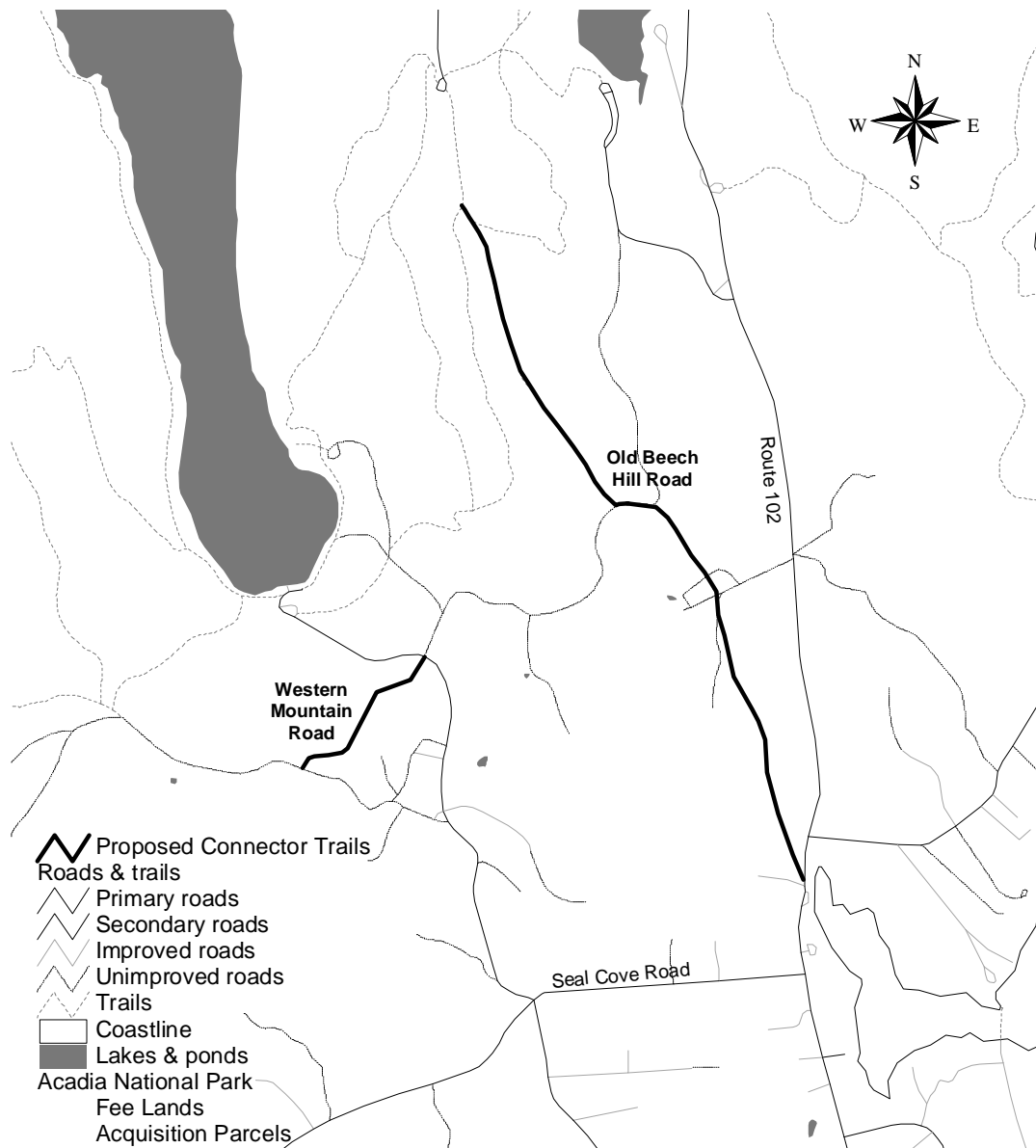


Figure 2: Proposed Connector Trails in Southwest Harbor

Western Mountain Road

This connector trail, for hikers, bikers, and equestrians (no motor vehicles), would connect two separate gravel roads in the park, the Lurvey Spring Road and the Western Mountain Road. Landowners include the park, the Town of Southwest Harbor (at the new filtration plant), and two private companies. To accommodate the mixed use, the trail would have a gravel base and be six feet wide. Of the 2,000 feet of trail proposed, about 1,500 feet are on private or town lands and the rest in the park.

Several alignments were examined for this trail. The preferred alignment begins at the junction of the Long Pond Road and the Lurvey Spring Road. From here, the new connector would be a direct continuation of the Lurvey Spring Road, crossing Long Pond Road and going through the woods near the blueberry field to the edge of the landfill. From here, it would skirt the edge of the landfill and run just east of the new filtration plant for Southwest Harbor. Some revegetation of the landfill slope would screen the landfill from the trail.

The trail would then enter the forest at the southeast end of the filtration plant site, cross into the park, and continue to the end of the Western Mountain Road. The forest here is relatively mature spruce-fir.

One alternate alignment considered was using the Long Pond Road for a short distance and entering the filtration plant access road and then park property at the back of the filtration plant site. A second was to go on the other side of the filtration plant (along the northwest boundary) and use park property all the way to the Western Mountain Road. These were rejected because they required more disturbance to an undisturbed mature spruce-fir forest, made little use of already disturbed lands, were not continuous with the Lurvey Spring Road (both require a short jog in the route), or raised issues of trail user safety and the security at the filtration plant site. Another alternative that was rejected was improving the Cold Brook Trail (it runs from Long Pond parking to the Gilley Field) for shared use. This route is also not continuous with the Lurvey Spring Road, and if it was opened to horses, might compromise the water quality of Long Pond.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

In this section, we present a description of the existing or baseline environment before any action is taken.

Acadia National Park (ANP) consists of 38,000 acres located along the coast of Maine in Hancock and Knox Counties. Most of the park is located on Mount Desert Island (MDI) with outlying portions on Schoodic Peninsula, Isle au Haut, and other coastal islands. At 1,532 feet in elevation, Cadillac Mountain is the highest point on the east coast of the United States, and the park is known for its scenic, glaciated, mountain and island landscape. The park receives about 3 million visits annually.

A moist climate supports a diverse flora in the Acadia National Park landscape. Vegetative communities include spruce-fir, hardwood, mixed forest, and sub-alpine. Wetlands range from deep lakes to cedar swamps and raised coastal bogs. ANP supports typical Northeastern U.S. assemblage of mammals and other wildlife, and an exceptional abundance of bird species.

The park's trail system offers accessible and diverse day-hiking opportunities to visitors. One hundred thirty miles of trails are available along with 44 miles of carriage roads. The Historic Resource Study of the trail system is expected to result in the nomination of the system for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Many trails were built with a high standard of stonework. Several are memorial paths named for benefactors or dedicated pathmakers. Memorial paths often have recognition plaques that help illustrate the rich trail history of Mount Desert Island. The development of the Park Loop Road and interest in auto touring, low funding, low use, development outside the park, and the 1947 fire led to the abandonment of many miles of trail since the 1940's.

Because of a long history of trail development and use, the landscape of Acadia National Park and Mount Desert Island is divided by many travel routes including trails, carriage roads, and a variety of auto roads. More than one hundred miles of trails have reportedly been abandoned and many miles of abandoned roads exist as well. Development of new trails must consider this existing landscape condition. There has been a long history of recreational trail development to enhance visitor use, and it has been an integral part of the history of Mount Desert Island and the park. However, natural resource and wilderness values have been affected by this development.

As mentioned, a tradition of public use of trails on private lands was established long ago on Mount Desert Island, and it continues to this day in Northeast Harbor and Seal Harbor. In Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor, the former trail connections to the park have been lost for reasons described earlier. Visitors must drive into the park to begin a hike, contributing to the congestion on park roads, or choose to walk on roads to access park trails. Walking on roads is less appealing to most walkers because of safety concerns.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Earlier, the following important issues associated with the development of these connector trails were identified: natural resources, visitor experiences, communities and neighbors, park operations, and cultural resources. In this section, we will take a closer look at the positive and negative effects of Alternatives A and B as they relate to these issues. A discussion of mitigation measures for Alternative B is in the next section.

EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE A (No Action)

Natural Resources

Under Alternative A, the only adverse effects on natural resources would be to air quality. Without the greater accessibility of connector trails, visitors and residents would continue to drive into the park to hike, contributing in some small degree to local air pollution. However, the new bus system would also allow visitors to access the park without their cars, and may have an even greater effect in reducing local air pollution. Positive effects of the no action alternative on natural resources would be that individual plants would not be destroyed and soils would not be disturbed due to construction, wildlife habitat would not be further impacted, and any potential wildlife disturbance from visitor use would be avoided.

Visitor Experiences

By driving into the park to begin hikes, visitors would contribute to congestion on roads and at parking areas. As mentioned above, the bus system has the potential to reduce auto traffic in the park more than connector trails. However, without connector trails to complement the new bus system, one-way hikes or bike rides into the park or back to towns would be less attractive. Safety of pedestrians already walking into the park on roads would not be improved.

Communities and Neighbors

One positive effect of the no action alternative would be that potential problems are avoided with parking and increased auto traffic on town roads and in neighborhoods, increased foot traffic through neighborhoods, or trespass or vandalism on private property. An extra burden would not be placed on local communities to construct and maintain trails or to monitor visitor use problems and manage them. However, community life in Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor would not be enhanced in any way by having more accessible and safer access on foot trails into the park.

Park Operations

An extra burden would not be placed on park staff to construct and maintain trails or to monitor visitor use problems and manage them. Park staff time spent managing traffic congestion and parking problems would not be reduced.

Cultural Resources

Adverse effects to cultural resources are usually associated with soil disturbance, which is absent from Alternative A. The Jesup Path, the Gurnee Path, and the Old Beech Hill are the connector trails that clearly have some historic value. These trails have been abandoned for 50 or more years and some degradation has occurred. The No Action alternative does not change the current state of these trails. Degradation would continue to slowly take place.

EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE B

Natural Resources

Individual trees and shrubs, other plants, and soil would be removed to construct the connector trails. The construction and use of trails may also displace wildlife from commonly used habitats. For the most part, trail alignments have been selected to avoid traversing undisturbed habitat to reduce effects on wildlife.

However, the Jackson Lab/Sieur de Monts and Old Beech Hill Road connectors both traverse relatively undisturbed areas known through research to be used commonly by deer. There is some human use of these trails or areas now, but if a trail is formalized, use and disturbance might increase. On the other hand, deer are becoming more adapted to human activities throughout the northeastern U.S. Effects to deer or other wildlife are difficult to predict. The issue becomes one of general ethics related to wildlife disturbance. It may also be a matter of the cumulative effects of habitat encroachment from trails and other developments on Mount Desert Island and in the park.

Within the park, none of the connector trails would traverse or come near habitats for threatened and endangered species or species of concern. Connector trail alignments outside the park have not been completely surveyed for rare plants, but would be before construction. Connector trails avoid wetlands, but they do cross the floodplains of small streams at two bridge sites on the Great Meadow Loop, one bridge site on the Gurnee Path, and at a stream crossing on the Old Beech Hill Road (Lurvey Brook).

Almost any trail creates the potential for soil erosion, especially on steep slopes where a steep grade of trail may be needed. Of all the connector trails, the Old Beech Hill Road would have the greatest potential for erosion due to its slope. The others all have grades that are more modest. The Great Meadow Loop would have two stream crossings and the Gurnee Path one; at these locations, sedimentation in streams would be possible. Mitigation of these effects can be accomplished through standard construction techniques. None of the proposed connector trails is near any public water supplies or other lakes or ponds. The Western Mountain Road connector is not within the Long Pond watershed, although it is within one-quarter mile of the pond.

If visitors and residents walk or ride bicycles into the park on connector trails, local air quality would not be degraded as much as if they drove their cars. The positive effects on air quality are small, but the less people drive into the park, the better. Connector trails and the bus system together would contribute to better air quality. Effects of trail construction on air quality due to dust and vehicle emissions will be temporary.

Visitor Experiences

The development of trails is usually thought of as enhancing visitor experiences by facilitating access to areas of interest. These connector trails would do this. They would provide better access to the park via trails. They would allow the trail experience to begin much closer to town and provide safer access for all.

There is a trade-off however. An established trail and its use would reduce the opportunities for exploration of wild areas, affecting the experiences of visitors choosing to experience the park off-trail or on abandoned trails. Some connector trails would cut through tracts of essentially wild lands, usually following abandoned trails or roads. Most are located close to roads or the edges of developed properties where they would have less of an impact to off-trail experiences, but be slightly less interesting for users.

An argument can be made that with the bus system beginning in 1999, the need for connector trails does not exist or diminishes. The bus system would likely do more to reduce auto traffic and congestion in the park than connector trails. However, it also appropriate to view the two as complementary; connector trails may encourage visitors to use the bus for visits to the park, enhancing visitor experiences by making one-way hikes and bike rides more attractive.

The scenic value of these trails would vary, with some offering outstanding views of mountains and oceans, and others offering more intimate views of forested landscapes. Some simply fulfill their connector function, while others have great value independent of that function. None of them would be visible from a distance. Several trails parallel existing roads for much of their length and can be seen easily from the road and vice versa.

No increase in noise that might affect the visitor experience is anticipated from appropriate trail uses. Noise associated with construction would be temporary.

The Town of Southwest Harbor and the park are discussing the option of closing the current parking area at Long Pond and constructing a new one just up the hill at an already impacted site. This move might encourage connector trail users to park here along with users of the pond and various other trails, adding to an already existing parking problem in the area.

Communities and Neighbors

The development of connector trails, even if it occurs only on park property, would have the potential to affect park neighbors through increased foot traffic through neighborhoods or past homes, trespass on private property, increased auto traffic or parking problems. On the other hand, walking trails are a highly desired feature in residential areas. Effects of construction on park neighbors will be temporary.

Effects on local communities are the same as those to park neighbors with some additions. Outside the park, parking problems, trespass issues, and unauthorized or inappropriate trail uses would have to be addressed by local authorities. Trail maintenance would have to be provided by local interests. The Old Beech Hill Road connector has the potential to become a drive, park, and hike experience because there is a pull out on Route 102 right at the trailhead. Parking problems may develop at this location.

The economic effects of trail development would be minor and positive. A few businesses providing overnight accommodations near trailheads may have a slightly better opportunity to market their businesses because of nearby connector trails. But in fact, many hotels, motels, and bed and breakfast businesses in Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor can also use connector trails as a marketing opportunity because of their proximity.

Park Operations

Trails must be maintained, and we estimate that collectively these six connector trails would add almost 4 miles to the park trail system. Park volunteers could readily perform most of the routine maintenance on new connector trails. Park trail crews would oversee these volunteers and would do all the heavier work. Unauthorized uses may occur on these new trails, creating an extra burden on park rangers.

Cultural Resources

Based on an archeological review by staff from the Abbe Museum, no prehistoric archeological resources are known to be on or near these proposed connector trails. Sometimes archeological resources may be disturbed by trail construction activities or by providing easy visitor access for theft of artifacts or vandalism. This does not appear to be an issue with connector trails.

Three connector trails would take advantage of existing but currently abandoned trails or roads that have important historic value. The Gurnee Path, the Jesup Path, and the Old Beech Hill Road would provide the opportunity for interpretation and appreciation of interesting cultural resources and the history of Mount Desert Island and the park. Historically accurate rehabilitation of these trails and their continued maintenance would stop the slow degradation now occurring.

The Great Meadow Loop Trail would parallel the Park Loop Road for several hundred yards in the nearby woods, and for perhaps 100-150 yards be adjacent to the road. This might have some impact on the cultural landscape of the road, which has been nominated for the National Register of Historic Places.

Other Effects

Some unavoidable adverse effects would result from the construction of connector trails. Trees, brush, and other plants would be destroyed. Soils would be removed to create a treadway. However, these are not irreversible actions. Areas affected by construction can be restored. Trails can be abandoned and de-emphasized through information and education efforts and allowed to recover on their own. Bridges can be removed. Most of the effects described above are avoidable or can be mitigated, and most of them are not irreversible, given enough time.

The cumulative effect of building these trails should be noted. The park is heavily

developed with trails, carriage roads, and motor roads. These six connector trails would add more trails to this landscape. It is possible that some of these trails might become quite popular and heavily used as time goes by. If this happens, then some effects described above might increase as well.

MITIGATION

The park botanist has field checked all connector trail alignments. No threatened or endangered species of plants are known to be at risk. When exact alignments are flagged for construction, a final botanical inspection would be made. The park wildlife biologist has been consulted about the encroachment of wildlife habitat from trail construction. Most (but not all) connector trail alignments were selected to avoid traversing undisturbed habitat to reduce effects on wildlife. Archeologists from the Abbe Museum have reviewed a map of all connector trail alignments, and made selected site visits to assure Native American archeological sites are not at risk. No sites were found. The State Historic Preservation Officer would also be consulted before any trail construction.

All connector trails would be constructed according to established standards to control drainage and avoid erosion and sedimentation. Additional standards related to style of construction would assure that the Jesup Path, the Gurnee Path, and the Old Beech Hill Road are rehabilitated in a historically accurate manner. The final alignments for the connectors would be selected to avoid wetlands and floodplains (except for bridge sites, where trails would cross floodplains along the shortest route). Abandoned trails and roads and other disturbed areas would be used wherever possible to avoid new cutting and disturbance to vegetation. Appropriate state permits would be obtained for the construction of the trails.

The Village Connector Trails Committee has worked closely with private landowners to assure their concerns have been met, and would continue to do so. Connector trails would be signed and promoted according to the wishes of private landowners involved, with an emphasis on continuing the tradition of appropriate use of and respect for private property on Mount Desert Island.

A main purpose of connector trails is for visitors and residents to forego the use of autos to enter the park. In light of this, no connector trails would have any new parking areas planned for them. With the exception of the YMCA and the park visitor center, they were not planned to connect to areas of public parking. All efforts to encourage visitors and residents to use these trails would emphasize using the islandwide bus system and avoiding the use of autos to access them. Potential problem areas for parking would be monitored by landowners, the park, and the committee, and local authorities notified and areas posted if needed. Trails would be signed appropriately to notify users of authorized and unauthorized uses, and if necessary, physical barriers would be placed to prevent motorized use.

In the trails system planning effort coming later this year for the Mount Desert Island portion of the park, some consideration will be given to abandonment of existing trails. This might compensate to some extent for the cumulative effect of the development of these connector trails, especially for wildlife and visitor experiences.

SUMMARY

Any development involves effects that must be evaluated within the context of the mission and policies of the National Park Service and Acadia National Park, including the General Management Plan for the park. That context also includes the park's relationship with surrounding communities. Different parties may view the same effect as either positive or negative. This Environmental Assessment has tried to present all the effects of both alternatives.

We believe that the positive effects of connector trail development - enhancing visitor experiences and community life, reducing auto traffic in the park and local air pollution, and encouraging use of the bus system – outweigh the negative effects. Such negative effects can be mitigated as described above. Alternative B, to build six connector trails, is the preferred alternative. Public comment on the impact analysis in this Environmental Assessment will help the National Park Service make its best decision on the purposes to be served by connector trails.

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